

Questions and Answers About the New Quality Rating System: “Quality Care for Quality Kids”

For complete information on progress toward final approval and dissemination of this new system, as well as a copy of the entire Final Report of the Task Force, check the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) web site at: (<http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/kidsfirst/>).

A. OVERALL DESIGN OF THE QUALITY RATING SYSTEM

1. What is Quality Care for Quality Kids (QCQK) and why is it being developed?

The proposed quality rating system is a statewide effort to improve the quality of child care in Wisconsin by assigning 1-5 stars to each regulated child care program, much like what is done for hotels and restaurants.

The proposed system is unique to Wisconsin, but Wisconsin is following the lead of at least 12 other states that have developed statewide child care quality rating systems, some of which have been shown to be effective in improving child care quality.

An important goal of the program is to provide better information to families so that they can make more informed child care choices.

In the Wisconsin quality rating system, higher subsidy payments will go to programs that provide higher quality care and lower subsidy payments will go to programs that provide lower quality care.

2. Who is responsible for running the quality rating system?

The Child Care Section at the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) will have primary responsibility for developing, implementing, and overseeing Quality Care for Quality Kids. A statewide “provider file” at DWD will be the source of all data gathered on providers and programs, and will be responsible for assigning the star ratings to all programs, based on the number of points earned.

DWD will work with its partners in state licensing, the Child Care Information Center, The Registry, Child Care Resource and Referral, University of Wisconsin-Extension Child Care Research Partnership, and others for assistance in implementing and evaluating the system.

3. Which child care programs will be affected by the quality rating system?

All licensed and certified child care programs will automatically be part of the statewide ratings. Programs should begin to evaluate what they can do to improve their quality. Once finalized, programs will receive complete information about the system.

All regulated programs will receive a rating, which they can display in any way they wish (such as on advertising or promotional materials). The greatest impact will be for programs that serve high numbers of children in the state child care subsidy program (Wisconsin Shares), because ratings will directly affect payment rates.

All regularly and provisionally certified (non-licensed) family child care providers will be included in the quality rating system, but it is not yet defined how these programs will be rated and tied to the system of reimbursement. Certified providers are currently assessed only once every 2 years, there is considerable turnover among certified providers, and rates for certified providers are lower than for licensed programs, thus requiring adaptation for the proposed rating system.

The new system will include all child care programs, including school-age child care programs, although details have not yet been fleshed out for inclusion of these programs.

4. How will child care programs be affected by QCQK?

Programs that do not serve children receiving subsidy through Wisconsin Shares will still receive a quality rating. These programs will be able to use their star rating in any of their promotional materials.

Programs that serve children on child care subsidies currently receive bi-weekly payments based on the number of children served, the number of hours of care, and the ages of the children. In the new system, the rates will be modified to reflect the quality rating assigned to each program. Programs with ratings of 4 or 5 stars will receive additional payments in the form of a separate "bonus" check.

The Task Force set the "base level" for reimbursements at the 3-star rating level, meaning that reimbursement payments for programs receiving 3 stars would not be financially affected by the new system. Programs receiving 4 stars would receive a 10% higher, and programs receiving 5 stars would receive a 25% higher, reimbursement. Conversely, programs receiving 2 stars would receive a 5% reduction and programs receiving only one star would receive a 30% reduction in their reimbursement payments. These approximations were based on data simulations. Actual differentials will be determined prior to full implementation.

5. When is the quality rating system supposed to begin?

Ratings of programs could begin as early as January 2006. The Task Force identified general categories, but solid definitions have yet to be written. There is also a great deal of information-technology work that needs to be done before the system will be ready to go, and it is unclear how long it will take to get a huge system like this in place.

Assuming that the legislature supports the quality rating system in the budget by July 2005, efforts will begin in earnest to develop the systems in hopes of beginning to collect the necessary program data starting in January 2006. Full implementation of the system, tied to reimbursement for serving children on state subsidies, is unlikely to begin before July 2006, and could be postponed beyond that date.

B. OPERATIONAL COMPONENTS OF THE QUALITY RATING SYSTEM

1. How will number of points and number of stars be determined?

Data on educational qualifications of director, teachers, and family child care providers for each program will be submitted to DWD by *The Registry*. It would be

in the best interest of each program to have their qualified staff current on *The Registry*.

Determination of points for “learning environment/curriculum” and “business Practices” will require an on-site visit to each licensed program. Some data will be available electronically (e.g. accredited programs and food program participation).

DWD’s child care provider file will be the source of all program data, and DWD will be responsible for using the accumulated data to determine the number of stars that each program receives.

2. How often will programs be assessed or re-assessed, and by whom?

It is expected that all programs will receive at least one unannounced “rating visit” each year. The rating would be maintained for a year with two exceptions: a) if a program went out of regulatory compliance, a procedure would be in place to move it to a one-star level, or b) if a program became accredited, that program’s score could be re-calculated to reflect its higher rating.

Over time, the database could be updated more frequently to reflect ongoing changes in child care programs, after those changes have been validated.

3. What licensing violations could cause a program to drop to a 1-star rating?

The definition of “regulatory compliance” is still being developed. The goal will be to identify those programs that consistently violate basic licensing rules and create conditions that fail to protect and promote the health, safety, and development of children in care. Research is currently being conducted to identify specific conditions and rule violations that would lead to a program’s being designated as “out of compliance” with licensing or certification rules.

4. What can providers do if they disagree with their assigned rating?

An appeal system will be developed to allow programs to appeal the ratings they receive. The system is designed to be objective, using clear criteria.

5. Why is education treated as more important than experience?

Research indicates that providers with higher levels of education tend to provide higher quality care than providers with lower levels of education. Research also provides strong support for accreditation as a predictor of child care quality.

Research provides mixed results on the impact of years of experience on the quality of child care. Some providers provide increasingly high quality of care over time, while other providers stay in a program because they lack the skills to try another position. Yes, this runs counter to our common sense, because the best teachers we have known are people who have gotten better and better each year by learning from their experience. But here is the problem: other people stay the same each year because they fail to learn from their experiences. You have probably met that kind of teacher also. The problem with using “years of experience” is that it doesn’t have a consistent effect on people. Education is different. It has a moderate sized and very consistent effect on most people.

Research finds that educational training is far from a perfect predictor of quality of care, but it is a far better, more consistent predictor than is years of experience.

C. RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE QUALITY RATING SYSTEM

1. How will families in communities learn about the quality rating system?

There will be a web-based system where star levels will be posted, with access by all of Wisconsin's citizens.

Ratings will be public information, shared through child care resource and referral (CCR&R) consultations to parents seeking child care, by Wisconsin Shares subsidy staff, and other sources. Every attempt will be made to "explain" the star system in order to help families at all socio-economic levels make informed child care choices.

2. What if there are no 5-star programs in a particular community?

The quality of care for children across Wisconsin is not always of the highest quality, but it is expected that coordinated training efforts, program improvement projects, administrator workshops, accreditation applications, and open discussion by community leaders will help to focus attention on the importance of high quality and will lead to improved quality of care across the state.

Key planning groups such as child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agencies or early childhood councils are also likely to work to help improve the community's child care.

3. What resources will be available to help providers increase their quality?

Strong efforts will be made to help providers understand the resources currently available to them. A Public Education campaign will focus on describing, for example, how providers can benefit from knowledge of *The Registry*, T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, and the accreditation process.

Technical assistance will likely be available to programs through funding made available by DWD to help programs reach higher levels of quality as part of this initiative, although this component of the system has not yet been developed.

4. What if there are no resources available in my community to help me improve?

For quality of care to improve across the state, it will be necessary for technical assistance programs, educational programs, and other support services to be coordinated and targeted to assist programs that seek to improve their quality of care. To strengthen the Quality Care for Quality Kids rating system current support opportunities may need to be restructured in order to make them available to all providers who wish to improve.

5. What if providers have ideas or concerns about the developing system?

General comments, questions, or concerns about the statewide quality rating system as it is being developed are welcome and should be directed to DWD staff member, Kath McGurk, (Kathy.McGurk@dwd.state.wi.us or 608-266-7001), who

will continue to update the website (<http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/kidsfirst/>) with pertinent information as the system is being developed and implemented.